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Ref. file

TO: General Lansdale

FROM: Dan Ellsberg

SUBJECT: Mission Council Meeting - July 25, 1966

GROUP-4

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Declassified after 12 years.

Ambassador Porter began the meeting with the comment that "General Thang had made some very interesting remarks to General Lansdale the other day. He is concerned with making the elections as well run and honest as possible. I recommend that Lansdale be requested to ask Thang just how we can be most helpful to him. That might mean help ^{ing} Thang move about the country or helping other people move. If anyone has any suggestions as to how we might help, they should tell Lansdale. It is good luck for us that Thang has the Ministry of Interior at this particular moment and that he is the kind of man he is.

"Lansdale should, of course, keep in close touch with the political section on this.

"We are going to come in for a good deal of criticism on these elections -- the newspapermen are watching very closely and they are quite critical already -- and we want to come out as well as we can."

Lodge responded to this opening with a good deal reserve launching into a rather long commentary that put him on distinctively different ground from Thang, Porter and you. He began: "When you talk about honest elections, you can mean two things: 1) lack of intimidation -- ~~they seem to have~~ ^{this we met} 2) the fear in some quarters -- not, I think, in the highest quarters -- that we won't be nice enough to the people who

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would like to tear the whole thing down. When I see some of the cables coming in just now I'm reminded of a song that they had during World War II, 'don't let's be beastly to the Germans'." Porter nodded and interjected, "Don't let's be beastly to Tri Quang." (This was clearly a reference to the LIMDIS cable in that morning from State expressing concern about exclusion of ex-Struggle force candidates from the lists, among other things.) Lodge continued, "You've got a gentleman in the White House right now who has spent most of his life rigging elections. I've spent most of my life rigging elections. I spent nine whole months once rigging a Republican convention to choose Ike as a candidate rather than Bob Taft. If that was bad ..."⁷ The issue here is whether you can have open primaries. The fact is that in Southeast Asia in wartime you simply cannot have open primaries. The next question is then, who decides who can run? What worries me about the newspapermen is that they set higher standards for these people than we set for ourselves at home. Nixon and I would have taken Chicago in 1960 if there had been an honest count. The Republican machine there was simply lazy; they didn't get out the vote, and they didn't have anyone watching the polls. But I don't blame the Democrats for that, I blame the Republicans. There is just a limit to how naive or hypocritical we can afford to be out here." Lodge turned to Porter and said, "Is that responsive to your question?" ⁸ Porter, looking slightly taken aback said, "I just thought General Lansdale should stay close to General Thang on the issue of elections." Lodge replied,

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"Well, I want General Lansdale to stay close to Thang on the subject of elections; and I want General Lansdale to stay close to Thang on the subject of pacification, which I think is a great deal more important." *so far
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"The military situation is pretty good now and we have adequate political stability. I think Hanoi has given up on winning a military victory. And Hanoi has given up on getting a government in here that would go neutralist. But Hanoi still has hopes about pacification. They hope that when the fighting stops they'll still have their apparatus and their guerrillas in the countryside, and they'll be able to build right up again. The important thing to do is to move ahead on pacification and dry up the new Vietcong recruiting." Porter commented, "That's turning out ^{to be} very difficult ~~to do~~." Lodge: "Yes it is difficult. Any way on the elections if they just don't set higher standards for elections here than we have at home that's all right with me and it will turn out all right here."

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Porter continued with comments on Revolutionary Development. He reported that Thang had agreed to hold the next class at Vung Tau to 5,000, and was planning seminars for district and province chiefs and Revolutionary Development staffs. He said, "In the past we overlooked how essential it is to have the teams supervised and supported by the district chiefs; now we're plugging that hole." (This point was the main one I reported to Porter from my trips to inspect Cadre in the field; I was glad to see it had sunk in so well.)

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Continuing with his Lansdale items, Porter said, ~~ED~~ has obtained a copy of a speech that Thang has written for Ky to deliver shortly. It mentions some provinces that have done very well in Revolutionary Development. It seems that it might be a good idea to have Ed suggest to Thang that the province chiefs who had done outstandingly well should get spot promotions. What is your opinion on that?" Lodge asked Westmoreland what he thought; Westy looked very dubious and said, "I would want to examine that very closely for one thing, I would want to discover whether the improvement was due to the province chief's own efforts or not." (This question is scarcely raised when a ^{Victor} Regimental Commander gets the Gallantry Cross because U.S. Air has killed 100 VC in the general vicinity of his units.) "Besides, recognition like that coming from Americans could be the kiss of death. I don't know a single exception to the rule that when an American has praised a Vietnamese official, that man has been canned within a few months." Porter protested that this recognition was to come from Ky, not the Americans, but Lodge carried on, "In my first term here, I praised a province chief and ruined his career; I've never gotten over it." Westy recommended that instead of promotion we might recommend that such province chiefs be given a medal. "We didn't want to get in a position of appearing to meddle in their personnel matters." Lodge, agreeing, picked up a JUSPAO report and quoted it to the effect that many Vietnamese officers were getting sensitive about too

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many Americans giving advice in the provinces and actually stepping beyond the role of advisors. "There isn't any doubt," Lodge commented, "but the way we must get things done around here is to get them to think that they thought of it. That's always the way when there is more than one nation involved." Porter added, "The people at our level know that we bend over backwards to protect their sensitivities; the problem arises at the lower levels."

~~I was grinding my teeth during this exchange, after my initial thrill at hearing the suggestion that we might actually encourage the GVN to promote on the basis of merit and performance. It was particularly frustrating to have this shot down on grounds of a principle that we should not influence their personnel policies, since I am now convinced that if we do not ^{influence} move their promotion system in this direction our joint efforts are doomed. As for worries about an American kiss of death, encouragement could be given in purely impersonal terms: "I understand you have made an evaluation of the performance of your various province chiefs." Why not, instead of just congratulating the best ones -- whoever they are -- give them a promotion?" It is not too late to pursue this question further, and Porter was clearly in favor of your doing it. It is nothing short of essential that we focus the Vietnamese upon the principle of promotion on the basis of merit.~~

Westy suggested that elections be used to promote the flow of ralliers; perhaps Qui Chanh could carry the word to

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the villagers that elections were an indication of the freedom of life on the GVN side, as an inducement to defection. Casler said he had asked MICH whether Qui Chanh can vote or not.

(At this point Porter translated Qui Chanh, at Lodge's request, and was complimented for speaking Vietnamese.) No one knew whether they were currently allowed, and when Lodge asked for opinions, Mann, Porter and Westy all commented they thought it would be a good idea if they could vote. Porter commented that no communists would be listed as candidates so there was little to be lost, and there were not enough Qui Chanh to effect the outcome anyway. Porter suggested that you pursue this with Thang. [I think there is a lot of mileage in this idea.] Lodge agreed that offhand it seemed like a good idea.

Westy reported that Brig. Gen. Tobias, who had served in Korea, would head a Philippine Task Force. Chief of Staff Amatos and Tobias were very happy about the location in ⁷Tuy Ninh. Marcos was worried about the Filipinos being zapped, which would be/ political setback. He had written Marcos that a U.S. brigade was being put in the area, a month earlier. Amatos wants the group to have combat equipment: M113s, 105s, 4.2s, tanks. Westy said he was delighted and had ordered them to be given everything they wanted plus M16s; we had no tanks to give them, but Westy had gotten Vien to give them four M41 tanks from ARVN.

Casler reported that "the election situation was going well in the provinces, but was stalled at headquarters; civil servants were more demoralized than before, not knowing whether

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Tri would keep them on or bring in his own people, so they are doing nothing." (I started by saying that JUSPAO was "still having trouble making any contact with Tri: no one from JUSPAO had managed to make contact." He had an appointment with a low bureaucrat who had an office near Tri's, and hoped to make some inroads that way, convincing Tri that JUSPAO had some capabilities for helping him.) Casler said that a documentary film and a cartoon booklet had been completed on how to vote. Porter broke in, "Could they be induced to let the Ministry Interior see it?" Casler: "I don't want to say yes on that for sure." Porter: "At least Thang should know of the existence of the film" (Another job for you.) JUSPAO wants MICH to film the whole election process. Corcoran reported that early analysis of the slates indicated that there were not very many military candidates. In I Corps there appeared to be no candidates from the Struggle Movement; whether because of boycott or exclusion was not yet clear. The VNQDD seem to be running the most candidates, followed by the Dai Viets.

[Later] Lodge reiterated to Corcoran, "Get it across to the press that they shouldn't apply ^{high} ~~high~~ standards ^{by the Vietnamese} (this morning in Saigon 1895 Lodge puts it slightly differently: "The first steps for us in Saigon and in Washington are to make it clear to the press and to Congress that Vietnam ~~xxxxxx~~ should not be judged by American standards.") here in Vietnam than they do in the U.S. They talk about corruption in Vietnam but not about expense accounts in New York."

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There was a long discursive discussion of PX and commissary privileges, with Lodge commenting that he had always favored a big Vietnamese commissary for both military and civilians, to enable junior officers and officials to maintain their standard of living. He favored direct approaches like this, more like the rice sales from the backs of trucks. Perhaps pork sales could be handled the same way. Porter commented that sometimes "they are too solicitous in Washington. There is plenty of pork in the Delta. If they don't have enough pork in Saigon, that's a Vietnamese problem. They should take care of that. I can't get too worked up if everyone in Saigon doesn't get a pork chop every single day; they never used to get any." He pointed out the unusually large numbers of bicycles and Hondas to be seen in Saigon, and the prevalence of expensive wrist watches.

I kept my mouth shut, ^{using the mouth,} with one exception. After a long discussion of the problem of unsolicited ~~presents~~ to Vietnamese and the troops, ^{using} recent ones several tons of bubble gum and foot powder, Lodge wondered whether there was no one in Washington who would take the responsibility for saying "no" tactfully to these inconvenient offerings, and I commented that this question had been on the agenda of the Vietnam Coordinating Committee almost every week last year. "Didn't they reach a decision about it?" Lodge asked hopefully. I said, "No more than on any other question ~~they~~ that came before the Vietnam Coordinating Committee." Lodge: "That's

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not a very strong tribute ... are you saying that they never reached a decision on anything?" I thought for about three seconds and said, "I can't think of any item that disappeared from the agenda never to return." This met no challenge, though Corcoran, who had been Secretary of the Committee all year, was sitting inscrutably across from me.

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July 26, 1966

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